



# Institute for **Public Safety Crime and Justice**

## **Volunteers on Horseback**

### **Initial Evaluation**

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**Date: 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016**





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Overall, the Volunteers on Horseback scheme provides a range of soft benefits for (i) Northamptonshire Police, (ii) local communities, and (iii) volunteers themselves. The scheme provides a range of benefits proportionate to the level of volunteer involvement - that is to say, given that the initiative is resourced by volunteers, the 'soft' nature of benefits are to be expected in relation to the outcomes observed.
- Reported experiences of individuals working as part of the Volunteers on Horseback scheme were overwhelmingly positive. All of those interviewed spoke of how they enjoyed being part of the scheme, and felt they made a positive difference, be that in reporting issues they come across or by engaging and reporting concerns back from members of the public. Some volunteers were also willing to become directly involved in the resolution of issues – something of an opportunity for Northamptonshire police in the future.
- Volunteers appear to be aware of the boundaries of their role, and the fact that they are to be seen as an 'eyes and ears' in the areas they ride, rather than 'have-a-go heroes'. This is testament to the training received.
- The nature of the tasks varied across the sample of volunteers. Some were predominately the 'eyes and ears' approach, with a focus on looking out for and reporting on issues to the police. Others took the opportunity to engage more with the public, and passed on local issues and concerns. Some were more proactive in hacking tailored routes based on local intelligence, and laying the groundwork for resolving issues.
- Where volunteers interact with members of the public, the presence of the horse was said to be akin to an ice-breaker, serving to change the encounter. Volunteers noted the public were more willing to engage, be that if they were curious about the scheme or to initially pet the horse.
- All volunteers identified that they felt supported by Northamptonshire police as an organisation, and that the scheme was well managed. However, local level variation was observed in the level of acknowledgement from area sergeants.
- Volunteers articulated that the level of risk that they are exposed to when on 'duty' – mainly from vehicles when riding on the road – was no greater than as part of their hobby. As such, the volunteers on horseback scheme does not appear to pull volunteers into riskier situations. In fact, by virtue of the fact volunteers have to also consider the safety of their own horse, meant that they would be less likely to directly involve themselves in an incident. This is however hypothetical: none of those interviewed spoke of an example where they were pressured into doing something which made them feel uncomfortable.
- The scheme appears to require little continual resource, for volunteers use their own horse bearing the cost of upkeep of animals.
- Both the PCSO and Volunteers on Horseback schemes reconcile well, given the similarities between the purpose and nature of PCSO/Police support volunteer roles. Mounted specials on the other hand is more distinct, and has the potential to expose the organisation, individuals, and the public, to increased risk.





## INTRODUCTION

Volunteers on horseback is a scheme set up as part of the Northamptonshire Police Rural Action agenda. Envisaged as a way to align public input into policing with individual hobbies and interests, the scheme invites 'responsible horse owners' who regularly hack around their local area, to sign up and 'help keep rural communities safe'. This report offers insight into the current operation of the scheme in practice, from the perspective of those involved. This will be explored through interview findings across a range of themes informed by (i) 'Northamptonshire Police Policy on Horse Riding Initiatives'; and (ii) current literature and practice. Consideration shall also be given to other mounted police schemes: PCSOs on horseback, and special constables on horseback.

This report is structured as follows:

1. Literature review – considering research around the use of mounted patrols in community contexts and PSVs.
2. Methods – brief overview of the methods employed to address evaluation.
3. Findings – run through of findings drawn from thematic analysis of interview transcripts with 9 volunteers, combined with reference to current evidence base.
4. PCSO/Volunteer/Special Constable roles – section to consider how these roles reconcile together
5. Summary and Recommendations



## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section will provide a brief overview of the current academic and grey literature surrounding (i) police support volunteers and (ii) mounted police units. Volunteers on horseback seeks to combine both of these elements; as such, these will be considered distinctly, then brought together through informing subsequent analyses.

### *(a) Police Support Volunteers (PSVs)*

Whilst much research surrounding police volunteering has primarily centred on the experiences of special constables (Bullock and Leeney, 2014; Hieke and Anthony, 2015), there is a lack of research which seeks to consider the experiences of Police Support Volunteers (PSVs). There is no simple definition of what a PSV is, for the roles carried out vary considerably across police forces (Unison, 2014). Some have described them as ‘auxiliaries’, who are similar to, yet distinct from, special constables: similar, in the sense that they give their free time to help local police forces, yet distinct, in that they are not sworn officers with full police powers (Bullock, 2015: 2).

Nationally, the College of Policing are seeking to explore the potential diversity of volunteer functions which could contribute to better service delivery for local communities and the public.<sup>1</sup> Whilst the promoters of the agenda refer back to the Peelian principles, seeking to increase public representativeness in policing, others suspect that this current drive is motivated by a need to ‘plug the gaps’ after recent cuts to police budgets (UNISON, 2014: 3). With forces across the country seeking to increase the recruitment of PSV roles, public sector unions have raised concerns about the lack of national guidelines and legislation providing a more defined remit as to the nature of these roles - more specifically, in relation to the risks volunteers may be exposed to as part of their role with the police (UNISON, 2014).

Recent academic work by Bullock has served to offer insight into the diverse nature of PSV roles. She found PSVs to be involved in tasks ranging from administrative, backroom duties through to being a uniformed, visible presence to the public (Bullock, 2015: 2). Conducting interviews with 14 PSVs within one force, Bullock identified that uniformed volunteers who were engaging with the community - for example, by attending neighbourhood watch meetings, giving talks at schools and youth clubs - conducted roles similar to those of neighbourhood policing teams (Bullock, 2015: 6). Bullock goes further to conclude that the PSV roles explored were akin to those of PCSOs, noting how both were often instructed to attend community events without necessarily considering the duplication of roles (Bullock, 2015: 6).

With this duality noted in the role of some PSV and PCSOs, Bullock identifies the potential for confusion about the roles and responsibilities of PSV - both from the perception of the public, and

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<sup>1</sup> More specifically, within their ‘Citizens in Policing’ programme. See <http://www.college.police.uk/What-we-do/Support/Citizens/Pages/default.aspx>



police staff (Bullock, 2015: 6). Those PSVs in some form of police-branded uniform reported that members of the public often sought their advice, to which they could respond with ‘common sense’ (Bullock, 2015: 7). Beyond this, where PSV had to refer queries back to salaried staff, the extent to which this was effectively dealt with by the organisation was questioned (Bullock, 2015: 7). This concern was exacerbated given that PSVs reported a lack of communication from their force in how such information was being acted upon; this was said to contribute to a sense of unease for some PSVs that, through being the public face of handing back such information and intelligence, the public may have a ‘false expectation’ of dialogue between themselves and the police (Bullock, 2015: 7).<sup>2</sup>

This small body of work identifies some important considerations, more specifically in relation to the potential risks PSVs, the public, and Northamptonshire Police as an organisation, may face. It is hoped that this evaluation will be able to draw from volunteer experiences in order to better understand these, and contribute to a more informed understanding of PSV experiences within Volunteers on Horseback.

### *(b) Mounted Police Patrols*

Whilst evidence presented here is primarily drawn from the use of police mounted patrols, it is nonetheless applicable to the current scheme(s), owing to the fact that purported outcomes identified in the Police Framework document largely accord with academic findings in the limited research outlined below.

Whilst the ‘symbolic resonance’ of mounted police units is said to be clear, little has been done to document the effectiveness and real value these patrols may bring to policing. Academic accounts in this field have typically come from equestrian enthusiasts, which lack both rigour and neutrality in their content (for example, see Nock, 2013). However in 2015, the University of Oxford in partnership with RAND conducted an 18-month exploratory mixed-method study into the deployment of mounted police units in different policing scenarios across England (Giacomantonio et al., 2015). They found that mounted police patrols had ‘unique operational and symbolic value’ in the maintenance of (i) public order, and (ii) community engagement (Giacomantonio et al., 2015). The former was theorised as ‘making barriers’, for example, when deployed to police football matches or riots - the impetrative being to maintain public order; the latter, in ‘breaking barriers’, with the aim of encouraging community engagement. Owing to the aims identified within the Northamptonshire Police Volunteers on Horseback scheme (and sub elements, e.g. PCSO on Horseback) evidence from the ‘breaking barriers’ strand will be explored further below.

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<sup>2</sup> ‘May’, given that examples of such false expectations were not found in the interview data; rather, Bullock’s analysis notes the potential for confusion.



## *Community Engagement from Mounted Patrols – Breaking Barriers*

Theoretically, Giacomantonio et al. (2015) identify the potential for mounted police patrols to increase local community engagement through (i) increased police visibility, leading to (ii) increased trust and confidence in the police. Current criminological research identifies the benefits that increased police visibility may bring, in terms of enhancing public confidence and trust in policing (Sindall and Sturgis, 2013; Tuffin et al., 2006).<sup>3</sup> The increased presence of police is said to represent a ‘symbol of order and stability’ to the public, in that where social order is perceivably maintained, this reflects positively on the police (Giacomantonio et al., 2015: 22; Jackson et al., 2009). Of course, this is linked to the extent to which interactions between the police and the communities they serve are positive; for some areas, increased police visibility ‘may make an already poor area worse’ (Giacomantonio et al., 2015: 24).

Mounted police patrols are said to bring together these elements in the following ways:

*‘...use of horses decreases the social distance between public and police, acting as an ‘ice-breaker’ and enabling interactions between officer and citizen through which trust can be developed’*

*‘Police horses in community patrol settings may encourage the public to experience friendly officers, seen as having trustworthy motives and engaged with the community, for example, by providing a focal point around which discussions between police and the public can develop’*

**Giacomantonio et al., 2015: 23**

Giacomantonio et al. (2015) go further, in seeking to substantiate these suggested theoretical links empirically, through the development and deployment of a quasi-experimental research design. The research team conducted both telephone surveys across matched experimental and control areas, and Systematic Social Observations of police-public interactions. These methods were employed into a quasi-experimental design to consider the extent to which mounted police patrols increased (i) police visibility, (ii) trust in police, and (iii) confidence in police. Three experimental areas received both foot patrols and additional mounted patrols; the three matched control areas received just foot patrols.

Systematic Social Observations were conducted by the research team in order to better understand the dynamics of interactions across 28 patrols – 15 mounted, and 13 foot patrols (Giacomantonio et al., 2015: 55). The research team found that mounted police were involved in ‘substantially higher levels’ of informal community engagement than foot patrols (Giacomantonio et al., 2015: 57). Mean engagements were reported to be 147 per hour for officers on horseback, in comparison to 24 per hour for officers on foot (Giacomantonio et al., 2015: 58).

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<sup>3</sup> However, increased police visibility is only effective at reducing *crime* when combined with, for example, community engagement and problem-solving (Zhao et al., 2002; Tuffin et al., 2006; Quinton and Morris, 2008) or targeted patrols at specific crime ‘hot spots’ (Braga et al., 2012).





To supplement observations, a total of 1,042 telephone surveys were completed across both the experimental and control sites, with both pre measures (residents surveyed before the scheme began) and post measures (residents again surveyed two months after the mounted patrols) undertaken (Giacomantonio et al., 2015: 39). Across ten measures of trust and confidence used, the researchers concluded that five measures were affected by the mounted patrols (Giacomantonio et al., 2015: 53). Measures of ‘trust in police community engagement’<sup>4</sup> improved in the test sites relative to control sites (Giacomantonio et al., 2015: 50). Furthermore, overall confidence<sup>5</sup>, and confidence in service provision, also improved (Giacomantonio et al., 2015: 50). In contrast, mounted patrols were found to have had little effect on measures of ‘police effectiveness’<sup>6</sup> (Giacomantonio et al., 2015: 53).

These findings should nonetheless be considered in light of the fact that most measures of trust and confidence fell in the *control sites* between the pre and post survey measures. As such, the suggested ‘improvements’, in comparison to the *experimental sites*, were described by the researchers as a ‘buffering’ pattern – that is to say, mounted patrols served to steady public opinion in the treatment sites, rather than increase it (Giacomantonio et al., 2015: 53). Empirically, the effect of mounted patrols on public reassurance and confidence was therefore moderate.

### *Beyond England and Wales*

Beyond England and Wales, the rationale for mounted patrols used within a community policing context has a long tradition in Canada, where the Royal Canadian Mounted Police for a long period have had a community-policing mission. Over time, this has been expanded to cover a wider remit, including restorative justice (see Chatterjee, 1999). Interestingly however, public support for their mission waned during the 1980s, with reported poor community relations and low officer recruitment (Deukmedjian and de Lint, 2007: 252). This mission has more recently been revived, with a shift from a community reassurance focus to one of community intelligence (Deukmedjian and de Lint, 2007). This shift has seen to change the dynamics of the force’s relationship with the public: the ‘community’ became ‘communities of interest’; ‘problem solving’ became ‘intelligence collection’; and neighbourhood interactions became ‘exploitative of trust relations with and within serviced populations’ (Deukmedjian and de Lint, 2007: 250).

As such, the aims of the Volunteer on Horseback scheme are aligned with findings from the current literature. Whilst crime control is not imperative, the extent to which local intelligence may lead to longer-term reductions in crime, is something to be further considered. These ‘softer’ evaluative efforts may add up to reveal substantial organisational gains for Northamptonshire Police.

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<sup>4</sup> Which included questions asking if police ‘understand local issues’, ‘engage with all members of the public’ and ‘deal with issues that matter’.

<sup>5</sup> Measured by asking if police ‘would provide a good service in the future’, ‘are able to deal with crime and disorder’ and ‘do a good job’.

<sup>6</sup> Measured by asking if police ‘are successful at catching offenders’ and are ‘successful at preventing crime’.



## 2. METHODOLOGY

Ethical approval was granted for the research by the Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at the University of Northampton on February 18<sup>th</sup> 2016. In total, 9 interviews were conducted with volunteers, with a good geographic spread across the county of Northamptonshire. Interviews were conducted over a two-week period week beginning 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2016. Participants were invited to take part via email, and to then contact the researcher directly if they wished to participate.

1 PCSO on horseback, and 1 Sergeant were also interviewed as part of the evaluation.

### *Semi-structured interviews*

Whilst survey measures are effective at being able to quantify more representative public experiences, they lack the flexibility to explore and better understand the nuances and dynamics of police-community interactions (Fielding and Innes, 2006). Qualitative research has identified a range of potential benefits which cannot be specifically quantified within community policing – such as, for example, the fostering of positive community relationships leading to the cultivation of crime-relevant information, and the visible presence of officers deterring would-be offenders (Fielding and Innes, 2006: 142). In recognition, this evaluation used semi-structured interviews to explore volunteer / staff experiences. This approach ensured that key research questions were answered, whilst allowing interviewees the flexibility to discuss their wider experiences. This was important given that little is known about the nature of volunteer experiences within this and similar schemes.

All interviews were transcribed in full. The principles of thematic analysis was used to identify key, consistent experiences and issues across the transcripts (see Braun and Clarke, 2006).



### 3. FINDINGS

From the outset, it is important to note that volunteers have overwhelmingly positive experiences. Many talked freely about how they enjoyed being part of the programme, and felt supported by the organisation. Any negative experiences, or suggestions for improvement, were typically probed by the interviewer.

As with all interviews, they can only present a snapshot from the perspectives of those who were spoken to. Other volunteers who did not participate in an interview may, of course, have differing experiences. That said, given the consistency of responses of those interviewed we can more confidently assert that volunteers share similar positive experiences. Whilst interviewees self-selected to participate, it is unlikely that this has served to positively skew reported experiences. For example, it is perhaps just as likely – if not more so – for those who potentially have negative experiences to want to share these. Notably, this was not the case.

Findings will be reported in the following topic categories:

- a) Aims of the scheme
- b) Nature of the role
- c) Training and assessment
- d) Support
- e) Public perceptions
- f) Benefits
- g) Risks
- h) Suggestions for improvements

Findings will be considered alongside the current evidence base in order to inform final conclusions and recommendations.

#### a. Aims of the Scheme

The most consistently identified aim of the scheme was volunteers being a resource to gather intelligence in rural communities. Being ‘eyes and ears’ was referenced frequently.

*‘You’re a CCTV camera just on four legs’*

*‘to be eyes where the police can’t get’*

In addition to reporting back to the police, most volunteers recognised that the work they do aims to reassure the public. The aim of reassurance was found to be linked with visibility; being on a horse was said to increase the chance that volunteers be noticed. In this vein, some volunteers also identified the promotion of road safety as a key aim of the scheme.



*'Capable guardians in harder to reach locations...it's a visible presence, it's an opportunity...for somebody who's going to be 12 foot up in the air, if you like'*

*'... to raise the police profile in rural communities and to assist with intelligence gathering...you can be covering quite a lot of countryside at different times of the day and in different areas'*

*'I'm there to try and promote road safety on the roads, to raise the profile of the police in the area, to kind of be a pleasant public face.'*

Interestingly, volunteers' perceptions of aims served to skew how they perceived their visible presence to be of most benefit. For example, those who spoke about being a reassuring visible presence described how the uniform encouraged community interactions through public curiosity. Conversely, those who also described road safety as the imperative spoke of the need to have bolder police crest and writing on their jackets, to ensure drivers slowed down when on the roads.

*'Seeing us from a distance, if people are reading what's on the back of my jacket, they will slow down and they'll pass and they'll be a lot more civil.'*

## **b. Nature of the role**

Typically, volunteers spoke of how the scheme reconciled well with their hobby of horse riding. Being part of the scheme also encouraged a small number of volunteers to explore areas beyond their traditional routes, as per the aims of the scheme in seeking to get to places where police do not typically patrol.

*'In terms of what I actually do, my hobby, no it makes no difference to me at all I'm about anyways it just makes me more vigilant'*

*'I'm just more vigilant when I'm out and...maybe I investigate odd places a bit more if I see something you know like, if I look at a set of tracks... I might actually wander down there and have a bit more of a nose, it makes me a bit nosier probably'*

Whilst volunteers are required to log their route before riding through Duty Sheet, some volunteers questioned the rationale for this, given that the free-text box was limited in characters. This gives the impression that this exercise may be somewhat unimportant as the information they provide might not be useful for the organisation.

*'So yeah, I go into there, log in, say how long my duty's going to be. And it asks you where you're going to ride. It's got a very limited area of space to put in where you're going to ride so I just now put [Area] because I can't actually say [Village A], [Village B], [Village C] and all the villages I might hit and which bridleways I might hit so I don't know how much detail they want. But it could be miles away, I can travel miles in two or three hours...'*



Whilst many hacks were typically described as 'uneventful', the main type of issues identified to affect rural communities included fly-tipping, and crime related to animals, such as theft of livestock, and badger-baiting / hare coursing. In line with the parameters of the role, rather than seeking to intervene directly to prevent the commission of these crimes/civil matters, volunteers noted that they would record such intelligence to pass back to the force. Some volunteers recognised that it was not appropriate to report certain issues to the police, and thus took the initiative to direct responses to the appropriate agency.

*'Yeah, I reported to the council instead of the police...somebody had like fly-tipped there was like 20 cans of cooking oil'*

*'There's phone number to ring...Never have had to use that. I've made...I think one report on email, which was a non-sensitive issue which I sent back just saying, I've noticed this, it was some fly-tipping and I noticed the packaging had labels on and I thought you might be able to track who'd done it through the address labels of the stuff.'*

Nobody gave examples of where they had witnessed a crime or incident in progress. Suspicious activities were identified as things that were 'out of place' or 'had been moved'. Volunteers articulated that life in rural areas is fairly stable; as such, changes to the landscape are typically indicative of certain crimes.

*'I go round obviously sort of looking out for anything that's changed to previously like sometimes if there's fields nearby... 'cause with raves and things like that a lot of fields are blocked off they either put logs across or things like that...'*

Some instances of bad driving were however more difficult for volunteers to report.

*'...the fact that you see bad driving is no use if you haven't got a registration number of make of car.'*

*'So I phoned through quite a lot of bad driving, car crime, things, well mostly bad driving or dangerous driving or disrespectful driving'*

It was evident that there is variation in the extent to which volunteers report issues back to the police. The reason for this may, of course, may be that some areas are generally quieter. Practical issues were also noted, such as lack of phone signal in many rural areas. Some volunteers therefore submitted monthly reports of issues, with the expectation that these be followed-up by Northamptonshire police.

*'We do have a phone number that we can ring in to the control room if we find anything; it's what they call a whisper number. You ring that and you're supposed to get sort of easier contact to the call centre and then you can pass any information onto them.'*

*'[I] do a monthly report and what I tried to do was put... things where I've seen someone, talked to someone, had an interaction, passed it onto the Sergeant and in fact I did that, I*



*kind of just put the whole thing, with this speeding through the village, you know, I put that I'd seen it on Facebook, I rode up there to have a look, yes they were driving fast, I came back, I reported it to the Sergeant and the action that was taken and the fact that I'd spoke to the parish council. So, yeah I think [they] like the way I report it I think, [they're] happy with that because it's like the whole scenario of, if there is a completed action then it's from start to finish what happened.'*

One volunteer spoke of how they tailored their hack in relation to local intelligence they had gathered, in order to add value to the local communities nearby.

*'What I started to do was look on [village] Facebook page and see what people are generally saying, so if there's a bit of anti-social behaviour or people say there's speeding through the village or there's petty crime or anything like that, then I'll try to make contact with them...say I'm a volunteer on horseback, I'll ride up and have a look'*

In addition to looking out for and reporting crimes/disorders volunteers come across, individuals also spoke about the level of interactions they have with the public. Half the group described that, by virtue of the fact that they ride consistent routes, members of the public had become familiar with their presence, and subsequently were more likely to engage and report their local issues or concerns. Interestingly, riders' horses acted as the focal point of interactions – or, as akin to Giacomantonio et al.'s (2015) research, the 'ice-breaker'.

*'They [the public] recognise you and they recognise the animals so they might not know you by name but they know who you are, what you do and once you explain it to them. They know the horse by name, yeah... that is a bit odd.'*

Notably, the extent to which volunteers engaged and interacted with the public varied across the group. Around half of those interviewed spoke of little interaction with the public, notably where riders either (i) varied their route frequently, or (ii) hacked during the early morning, or (iii) hacked on predominately bridleways.

*'Nobody's stopped me and asked me for anything.'*

*'It's slightly tricky around here because everyone sees horses all the time so trying to get myself noticed as something a bit different has, is tricky'*

*'Might come across the occasional dog walking, say hello, pleasantries, that's about it'*

Some volunteers also reported being involved in public events. Tasks varied from promoting Northamptonshire police at local equestrian events, and also a trial providing a mounted policing presence at a motor racing tournament.

*'I suggested doing the [racing event] to test it out and to me, so I do kind of know the benefit of doing things like that I suppose when I went I didn't really know quite how it would pan out or what benefit there would be but actually, you have to ride round to work out what's*



*best and the more you did it, the more you think, yeah, if I patrol down, you know, if I just ride down this road I know that that's helping the public stay safe because the cars aren't travelling so fast and I know that if I go, ride down here, I can talk to the public or, you know, and it worked very well actually.'*

*'Everybody was coming up, we had dogs, kids you name it and again it's good publicity but you know you've got little kids coming up and asking, 'When can I join?', you know.'*

### **c. Training and Assessment**

Volunteers are required to attend a riding and road safety exam conducted by representatives of the British Horse Society to ensure they are competent riders. This accreditation is professionally recognised, and whilst the majority of volunteers had no issue with the assessment, some voiced concerns about the conditions of the stables, and quality of teaching.

*'the actual exam, yes, we've got that, it made a lot of sense, the actual BHS exam made a lot of sense. And yeah, very good, sound advice.'*

*'I just felt it wasn't the best tuition. And the horses that we had to ride were not kept very well, the livery yard was appalling, the conditions were filthy.'*

Volunteers' horses are also assessed at their stables by an external assessor, to consider if riders are safe and that the horses are looked-after well.

*'It's got to be a certain height and it has to be obviously well cared for because again, the police are not going to want their name on something that looks half dead!'*

In addition, volunteers are required to attend an induction session at Northamptonshire Police HQ. It was clear that the training and induction at Wootton Hall (HQ) served to ensure volunteers were clear about the boundaries and nature of their role. Initial confusion about where to report information and intelligence to now appears to be resolved. The 'hot-line' number served to give volunteers confidence that the information/intelligence could be easily passed on to the organisation.

*'Well the boundaries of the role are, you don't put your horse in a risky situation, you don't ride anywhere that you're not comfortable riding. You don't try and tackle anyone, it's all about looking, recording, reporting and not getting involved.'*

*'you know we're not police officers, we're not PCSOs... we're nothing like that, we're literally a rural neighbourhood watch scheme'*

*'they can't give you training to deal with anything because they don't want you to get involved in anything that's happening'*



Some volunteers commented that training in helping diffuse confrontation or deal with potentially difficult people would help them feel more supported. Whilst volunteers did not report that they had any negative interactions with the public, one commented that training in 'how to handle people sometimes' would be reassuring. The following quote raises the importance of this given the potential risk to the organisation:

*'if you did get someone that was expecting you to do more because you have police on your back, it's like how do you get that particular situation resolved without either making the police, if they think you're police and you're backing off from a situation, you know, it's just things like that, it's just how you talk your way out of something if someone was expecting you... for example, if someone thought that a burglar was in the house, well obviously I'm not going to go in the house because I don't have a baton and all that, you know, but actually trying to convey that to someone who's really stressed because the burglar's in their house and in their property and I've got police on my back and they're expecting me to go in and do something, even though I can't because I've got a horse, but you know, it's things like that, it's just useful to maybe have some what if training.'*

#### **d. Support**

All of the volunteers spoke of how they felt well supported by Northamptonshire police. This support contributed to the positive experiences of volunteers so far, with many feeling valued by the organisation. The programme coordinator deserves special mention - all of the volunteers interviewed spoke of how she was supportive, and always available to respond to volunteers' queries.

*'[programme coordinator] brilliant, she's a really, really good coordinator...anything you want to say or anything, you know, it's really well supported which is lovely.'*

*'...they take a real interest in what we're doing...And I know if I emailed [programme coordinator] about something, she'd come straight back to me'*

Whilst central organisational support was consistent, local-level provision varied. Similar to what was identified in Bullock's (2015) research, this identifies potential gaps with communication within the organisation, with local areas perhaps unaware they have a mounted PSV on duty in their locality.

*'as a volunteer, I haven't been contacted once by the area that I work for.'*

Evidence suggests that the organisation supports volunteers on horseback by responding expediently to the rare incidences where volunteers are exposed to risk. This serves to ensure emergent risks are mitigated, and demonstrates the organisation's commitment to volunteer support and value. This support was well-regarded as demonstrated below:





*'We got into a bit of an altercation shall we say, with a driver who didn't realise that we were sort of volunteers. He got really abusive and threatening and he started to drive his car at the horses and beep the horn...trying to frighten them. It could've been awful, you know, [if the] horse wasn't so calm. I give Northamptonshire police their credit, I phoned them up with that and by the time I'd even got home...[individual] had been spoken to...they gave him words of advice. That's brilliant I mean you can't ask for much else can you than that'*

A consistent issue reported was with the uniform issued. Differences in the size of the logo between the summer and winter jackets were raised as a concern: the former having only a small 'rural action' logo, and the latter with the Northamptonshire police crest. The location of the police crests on the back of the winter jacket was not visible when engaging with the community about what the volunteers were doing. Florescent ankle bracelets for the horses were rendered 'useless' due to their poor quality. Given that (as shall be discussed) road safety was highlighted as the biggest risk to riders, sourcing of these should be reconsidered.

*'It takes time to get things, you know, we've said about our lightweight jackets that are really hopeless and they don't even have the word police on them'*

*'The leg bands they gave out are rubbish... there's has a very limited kind of tag to slot the Velcro into so it kind of dangles round your horses legs a bit like a bracelet.'*

#### **e. Public Perception**

Those who engage with the public reported positive interactions. Members of the public are said to have conveyed that they feel reassured by the presence of police volunteers, given the isolated nature of rural areas where police presence is typically limited. Volunteers recalled that many felt the scheme meant that community engagement was personable, 'putting a face' to policing. Interestingly, some volunteers recognised that residents were more likely to report issues to volunteers than 'bothering' the police by calling 101; their personable presence, as a 'go-between', sought to encourage members of the public to report suspicious activity/crimes.

*'people just feel reassured...obviously we're not police officers but we're a contact. I think with the public they'll worry about whether it's bothering somebody...so because we're not actually police they don't feel that they're bothering police'*

*'I mean it's bizarre because as I said earlier, they know we're not gonna be out and about at 2 o'clock in the morning when the chances are someone's gonna break in but they still feel reassured anyway that somebody's there to take note of the stuff that they might have seen'*

*'They don't feel taken seriously when they ring up 101 or when they ring up 999, or when they ... not that many of them have, but some of them have rung up 101, and they say that'*



*with ... all they do is take it down and I don't see anybody. Oh well, obviously they don't realise what's going on in the background.'*

It is interesting to consider why it is that the public appear to be more forthcoming to offer information to volunteers representing Northamptonshire police, rather than reporting directly to the organisation. As noted in Bullock's (2015) research, the extent to which PSVs can provide advice to directly resolve an issue, other than by phoning something in, may create a false expectation that those things reported will be actively resolved. It should therefore be considered how volunteers are communicated with about what will be done to resolve an issue, in order to better inform the public.

Awareness of the scheme relied on volunteers outlining what they are there to do. Some noted inquisitive scepticism from the public; although, by explaining the role, such conversations were said to end humorously.

*'They do get a bit...how can I say it...I won't say confused but they saying 'Well, if you haven't got any powers, what's the point?' and I'm like 'Well all...the point is it's like having a rural neighbourhood watch you know anything that you see, you let us know and we'll phone it in. So there's never anything negative'*

*'some people are a bit funny, you know, they sort of, they're like oh yes, you're riding 'round protecting us all aren't you, sort of thing.'*

Whilst volunteers identified feeling supported by Northamptonshire police, some expressed scepticism about how their role was perceived by the wider organisation.

*'It's difficult to know how the volunteer on horseback scheme is perceived in a wider audience, shall we say.'*

#### **f. Benefits**

All volunteers interviewed identified a range of benefits to (i) rural communities, (ii) Northamptonshire Police, and (iii) for themselves.

*'To me all of it's important. If I see something I can report it and we can stop crime or clear something up, that's great. If I'm interacting with the community that's great because again, you're making people feel less isolated you're making them feel part of something so I just think it's all... I wouldn't like to make any one bit of it any more important than anything else.'*



*(i) To the local communities served*

Through interactions with the public, volunteers identified that their visible presence helps to reassure residents in isolated rural communities. Similar to Giacomantonio et al.'s (2015) research, riders articulated that the presence of the horse served both to increase their visible presence, and also act as an 'ice-breaker' to encourage community engagement. This was reported to be so with both adults and children, said to be important for ensuring good relations between young people and the police for the future.

*'They see the car whizzing past but they don't feel secure because a car went past and didn't have time to see anything. PCSOs on foot or officers on foot, all with just a high-vis jacket now, there's so many people out there in high-vis jackets, we don't stand out any more...whether you're a cyclist, a BT man, everyone's wearing high-vis, so we don't stand out. The horse does, so the horse and me, we stand out so people feel they see us more...'*

*'That's what's important so, yeah it's just building up that good relationship really and kids, I think as well, 'cause kids will see the horse and pat the horse and at the minute there's a lot of children, 'Oo the police are gonna get ya' and there's this kind of cultural shift I think of kids thinking that police are bad or not to be respected and stuff so I think ... even if it's a little thing, just starting to help by patting a horse and being nice to a kid makes all ... it's just planting seeds isn't it, so ... but that's just 'cause I think too much.'*

Linked to the community dynamic is the personable nature of the interactions between volunteers and the public. As discussed above, some volunteers serve as a go-between for the public and the organisation. This is linked to a sense that this dynamic brings back a sense of community, where people 'look out for each other'. Notably this is something that volunteers reported that those in rural areas identify with. The reporting of incidents or concerns was said to build up a picture of intelligence, to help resolve or deter potential crimes or disorders in the future.

*'It brings that aspect of community back and that's what's missing a lot nowadays.'*

*'First, we're an immediate port of call and you know I'd say to them something along the lines of, 'Okay, well I'll take that onboard and I'll get it reported in and I'll keep you posted and let you know what's happening, is that alright?', 'Oh yeah, that'll be lovely', and of course when you see them again and I'll say to them, 'Oh, I did tell them about that you know, has anything happened since?', 'No, no, it's been fine' and they make a connection then of you doing that personal service as to why nothing has happened to them but it's not it's 'cause nothing's happened anyway but again, it's about perception, it's about what the community are thinking and feeling safe is all about how they feel, it's not about what threat is actually out there is it.'*

*'...you can be a bit lethargic about reporting things, you don't want to waste police time, you sort of, you think well that's just a number plate, that's just a van moseying around*



*slowly...but actually all those things, if you report them, they might build up a picture of something.'*

Around half the volunteers often mentioned (without prompt) the benefit of their increased visibility and yellow jackets with Northamptonshire police crest in slowing traffic whilst on the road. Many felt this was important given that many rural roads have national speed limit, yet drivers regularly fail to adapt their driving to the nature of the road. Their presence when on the roads is therefore said to benefit local villages in slowing traffic down when people travel through.

*'I tell you what does happen is the traffic slows down. The jackets do help slow the traffic...that's our biggest concern is speeding traffic through the village...there is a difference between wearing that and not wearing it because they're not so brilliant if we're not wearing it'*

*'Well I suppose, mostly it's cars because they just, around here, I mean the speed limit's 60 miles an hour but it's not safe to do 60 miles an hour on most of these roads.'*

#### *(ii) To the organisation*

A number of key benefits were identified for Northamptonshire police. Linked to the community engagement dynamics explored above, volunteers reported positive interactions. This potentially serves to ensure that Northamptonshire police is well-regarded, in that representatives of the organisation are in the community reassuring the public. There was no direct evidence to suggest volunteers who conduct this role was damaging to the organisation's image.

In being the visible 'eyes and ears' of Northamptonshire police, some volunteers spoke of how they felt police patrols in rural areas were not necessarily the most effective use of police resources. In addition, the mounted element means volunteers are able to patrol into areas which are not necessarily easily accessible.

*'...if you've got somebody out here patrolling around and it means the police don't have to come through quite so often, how great because that's just a better use of their time hence the fact that if we've got a more visible presence that would be probably more helpful.'*

*'Yeah, you've got the heights and you can get through stuff that cars can't do. Especially in the woods, you can get right into the heart of the woodland.'*

Some volunteers reported issues to appropriate authorities, not just to the police: for example, fly tipping to the local council, or issues in parks to wardens. This represents further resource saving to Northamptonshire police, with civil matters being directed to the appropriate authorities for effective resolution.

It is nonetheless important to consider how the increased reporting of concerns or issues – as noted through the positive community interactions above – may serve to increase demand on police resources in resolving reported concerns. Whilst the public may feel reassured that there is a



person to report concerns to, the extent to which such concerns are genuinely followed-up (or indeed, communicated as being taken seriously) may threaten the positive interactions reported. Of course, in order to follow-up and resolve concerns/issues, requires resource from Northamptonshire police. Whilst most volunteers were content to keep their 'duty' (so to speak) alongside their hobby, a minority wanted to be more proactive in resolving local issues, contacting relevant parties to resolve issues themselves. One volunteer provided an example of how they identified road safety concerns, and through instigating with the police, managed to set up the groundwork for an effective resolution.

*'...one of the issues that came up on Facebook was that there was speeding coming down into the village, and as a result of that, I said that I would see if I could do something and I spoke to the Sergeant... and she sent another guy... who's now the safety officer or something and he put a camera in at the village so that he can, well, monitor cars and their speeds and things like that. So I could report that back to the council which I did and that went to the parish meeting because they're looking at putting, you know, solar sort of powered cameras... where it just sort of tells you what speed you're doing as you come in the village, you know. So I like to think that's sort of helped a bit with what they can progress with.'*

Some volunteers identified that their visible presence may have stopped the commission of certain crime/civil incidents. It was however recognised that this is difficult to evidence.

*'I might ride out twice a day and I'm definitely around early in the morning and I, you know sometimes around on foot leading the horses up and down maybe that would disturb something and if that did that could only be a good thing.'*

### *(iii) To volunteers*

Interestingly, whilst not explicitly asked, volunteers consistently outlined a range of personal benefits to them since becoming part of the scheme. It was clear that those who take part in the scheme gained from feeling that they were able to 'give back' and 'make a difference'. This was not always tied to resolving specific issues; volunteers who interacted with the public benefited from feeling that they reassured people, or made them feel safer.

*'for me it's been a...yeah, I'm gonna go and do this 'cause I've got a purpose'*

Furthermore, volunteers reported expanding their own knowledge through experience and training, motivating them to be more confident - skills transferable to benefit their personal working lives. The following example highlights how these benefits culminated in the effective resolution of a suspicious circumstance which occurred outside of the volunteer's hack. This highlights how the connection between Northamptonshire police and volunteers served to further benefit the organisation and the public.



*'We had an email... it was about reassuring the public...all about terrorism 'round the time of the Paris attacks... look if you come across any people that are showing signs of this, this and this flag it up. I had this guy that was showing all sorts of nastiness so, yeah ... which I wouldn't have ... I really wouldn't have flagged up to the police had I not had that email because I would have thought ... for me it was like, well he's not like done anything. He was saying things and acting like a certain way, but he hadn't done anything and you can't arrest anybody for not doing things, so what's the point of phoning the police when all he's doing is saying stuff, he's not doing anything. But again when you see an email come in, I went back to it and thought, actually this is all about showing signs of, and I thought no I'm gonna phone in, so yeah we did and yeah he got removed, thankfully.'*

#### **g. Risks**

From the interviews conducted, it appeared that all volunteers were well-briefed and understood the boundaries of their role. Volunteers did not report that they were exposed to any more risk by virtue of their role as a volunteer on horseback, above that which they are typically exposed to as part of their hobby.<sup>7</sup> The most oft cited risks were road traffic, and the flighty nature of horses.

*'You get some lovely drivers who give you space and see you coming and all sorts of things but you do get some that really don't think you ought to be on the road at all, and this is in the country it's not ... we're not like dragged down the middle of the town or anything'*

*'What they say is use common sense really. If you feel at risk, if you think ... say there were two or three men you know and you were on your own, then the best thing to do is look, take note and just say hello, you know go on by and then once you get part then ring in and you can keep ... then you can pass that information on. The slightest little thing sometimes can make a horse spook.'*

There was no evidence to suggest that volunteers felt an implied pressure, by virtue of the fact that they carry the Northamptonshire Police crest, to get involved in responding to incidents. This includes if they were to be prompted by the public. Volunteers were able to clearly identify the boundaries of their role, and understood that they were not to do anything which put themselves or their horse at risk. That said, responses were in the abstract; there were no specific examples given of where the public had asked a volunteer to directly respond to an incident.

*'You're not ... I don't feel under any obligation to go and throw myself in front of the runaway car or the ... you know the man with a knife stabbing the baby ... what I feel is that I'm an extra pair of eyes and ears and I can report it quicker than ... any maybe tell somebody what to do about it which is to get help.'*

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<sup>7</sup> Only one confrontational incident was reported (see section on 'Support'). However, the volunteer spoke of how Northamptonshire police were quick to resolve the issue.



*'I'm quite clear in my head that I'm not a police officer, I'm not expected to do anything that a police officer would do. Yes, I'm gonna report stuff if I see it happening but I'm not in any way, shape or form gonna put myself in any danger by running up to somebody and telling them to stop doing what they're doing. I'm not that brave, stupid ... I'm quite happy doing what I'm doing, and I don't feel pressured in to getting involved in situations at all.'*

Whilst riding a horse was risky due to the nature of the animal itself, it is interesting to note that being on a horse served to actually reduce the risks volunteers were exposed to. The majority of volunteers spoke of how the practicalities and physicality of having their own horse present meant volunteers were less likely to involve themselves in risky situations.

*'You know and I totally understand people would want to get off their horse and go and help but then at the end of the day you're holding a live animal, somebody's got to look after that, you can't give it to somebody else to look after because they don't know the horse, the horse doesn't know them.'*

*'The issue if something like that would be, what the hell do you do with the horse while you're leaping off to do resuscitation?'*

Two volunteers, when probed, elaborated upon a number of potential risks which they were quietly concerned about. One spoke about a concern if individuals in a community would retaliate against volunteers if they were to report a local incident caused by a member of a village.

*'if someone took exception, someone saw me hacking around or saw, I don't know, maybe even if I was talking to someone, I mean like for example at the moment there's someone in the village...there's been a bit of petty crime and I haven't actually ridden up and seen her but if I do... someone might see me, you just don't know. You always worry about the safety of your horse, you know, if someone took exception to you, thought how can I get her back, oh well we'll go and set light to the stables or something like that, do you know what I mean?'*

Many volunteers have stables on their property, meaning they commonly hack around their local area; others keep their horses in nearby stables, and so hack around areas where they are not necessarily resident. This is an interesting distinction to note, for it may raise certain questions about exposure to risk, for both volunteers and Northamptonshire police, when volunteers live in the local area within which they report about issues. This is seen as a potential risk in rural areas given in some villages there is a close-knit community dynamic prevalent.

*'Living in small communities as we do, there are a couple of people... who've got horses and they are continually getting bad press from lots of people around because they always ride double file and they don't say thank you. And you know, as locals, we all know who they are, but if ever there's an incident with them, I don't want to be ringing up whoever...someone comes out and says you've been seen...and I don't want it to be seen as a personal thing. So*





*I think the only, you know, I think the police...has to recognise that we are doing it with the best intentions and hopefully we don't carry any personal issues into the situation.'*

*'Because that does happen an awful, I don't know about towns, but it certainly happens a lot round here because we all know each other, you know, and you can't help it. You live in a big family, you're going to have people you don't get on with from time to time.'*

Whilst there is, like with any initiative, a risk to the organisational image of Northamptonshire police in running such schemes, volunteers reported positive responses from residents in local communities. That said, one practical consideration with emerged when volunteers spoke about their hacking was the consistency with which they ride out. Riding can vary by weather, season, and time of day, as per the risk assessment in the current policy document. The service and the benefits the scheme brings therefore may be inconsistent, dependent upon the level of risk riders may be exposed to (e.g. dark nights in winter, treacherous conditions in wet weather). Whilst this does not present too much of an organisation risk at present, it is something to consider if the scheme is to be expanded.

*'In the winter just a couple times a week because obviously by the time I've finished work and get to the yard it's dark. So it's normally Saturdays and Sundays in the dark months, and then in the summer three or four times a week.'*

The importance of dynamic risk assessment is clear if riders are to be tasked to attend specific events. Given the flight nature of horses, it was identified they require training to be accustomed to new experiences. If horses are therefore tasked to attend specific events, risk assessments need to consider the horse's nature, and the provision of training to ensure horses react calmly to new situations which they typically would have difficulty in processing.

*'... there was a display on the Sunday and they had the typhoon over which is a big, fast, loud plane and that was something I probably wouldn't repeat doing. I did manage to get the horse, we knew it was coming but we didn't know until the day and we were already there, and someone said, oh you do know there's a typhoon coming over in 20 minutes or something? It was like, oh my goodness, so we get the horses down into the middle of the village, into the lowest point so that they weren't so vulnerable for the typhoon and we actually got off and found them some grass and kept them quiet that way and they weren't too bad actually'*

*'I'm training him as we go along based on what we're coming across here. So for argument's sake if next year it's decided that they want him in schools, well then I'll do a bit of work with getting him used to the school kids. So to start with, you know, we have the police car there to act as a barrier beside him and the children just come up in groups, one or two at a time, which he'll be absolutely fine with...'*





#### **h. Volunteer suggestions for improvement**

Volunteers were overwhelmingly positive about their experiences, but did provide a number of suggestions for how the scheme could be improved.

The most consistently identified issue was with the current uniform and the distinction between the winter and summer jackets. The summer jackets were said to be insufficient at ensuring volunteers were a visible presence and as part of the police family. Summer jackets do not currently identify volunteers are being part of, or representing, Northamptonshire police; this was said to have implications on community interactions and road safety. The size and position of the Northamptonshire crest is currently only visible on the back of the jacket. As reported, reflective leg bands were of poor quality and rendered unusable.

*‘Yes, I know you don't get the same ... in the summer you don't get the same interaction because people don't realise that you're doing it as part of a police’*

Others mentioned the potential for headcams to be issued, allowing poor driving to be recorded. One volunteer who had been hit by a car whilst hacking (before the scheme started) spoke of how they now wear their headcam in order to mitigate against potential risks.

*‘but I've been hit ... my horse got hit by a car going the other way and was knocked into a hedge and then I got hit by a car sort of near where the allotments are on the horse and it went the bottom and over on top of me, but he drove off.’*



#### 4. RECONCILING VOLUNTEERS, PCSOs, AND SPECIAL CONSTABLE MOUNTED PATROLS

Presently, Northamptonshire police run a number of other police-mounted schemes across the county. This includes a mounted PCSO, and mounted special constable. This section shall briefly explore how these roles reconcile together in relation to the themes explored above by volunteers.

##### (i) PCSO/Volunteer mix

The mounted PCSO role reconciles well with the volunteers on horseback. Given that, to date, the bulk of riders conduct a somewhat similar role (volunteers and PCSO) and have similar powers, the two schemes working together concomitantly does not present risks to the organisation. The advent of the PCSO role also meant that the practical benefits of patrolling areas on a horse (greater visibility and presence to the public, ability to see over hedgerows/greater distances) with direct possibility of direct tasking.

*‘Someone flagged me down, they couldn’t do that in the car. He stood parked, I wrote in my pocket notebook, I called on my radio.’*

*‘That when [PCSO] is on horseback, [they] can do exactly the same as what any other PCSO could have done on foot. And in fact you could do more because if you go past the hedgerows and fences, you can see over them’*

As identified in Bullock’s research, the role of community-facing PSVs can be seen to as akin to the role of PCSOs, albeit with perhaps a limited capacity to resolve issues as quickly.

*‘Whereas in my role, whether I’m on foot or whether I’m on that horse, I’m not supposed to get involved, my job is eyes and ears on the end of the radio so my job is to get other people there and to be a credible witness... that wouldn’t change whether I was on foot or I was on the horse, I wouldn’t be getting involved.’*

##### (ii) Special Constables

The extent to which the special constable on horseback scheme should be reinstated is questionable. The perspective of specials on horseback was not directly considered in this evaluation; however, informed through previous research and data from this evaluation, it is suggested that mounted specials could present an organisational risk to Northamptonshire police, with inconsistency of role, and perhaps increase the risk of false expectations of the public. Given the two key tranches of the use of horses in policing – either by maintaining public order, or seeking to increase community engagement – having a mounted special constable, with the same powers as a regular officers, would arguably change the expectations of the public in respect to what an officer is capable of doing. If Northamptonshire police were to consistently use mounted police officers (similar to the evaluation conducted by RAND) then this confusion would be lessened; at present, horses are only used a community engagement capacity.

Special constables, with the same powers as a regular officers, would have a duty to get involved in resolving incidents directly, whereas a PCSO or volunteers, do not. In fact, in the case of the latter,



it is explicit in training that they should not get involved. It is not hard to imagine circumstances where a special constable may, by virtue of the fact they are required to proactively resolve incidents, be exposed to risk through an implied pressure – be through public expectation, or a statutory duty – to dismount and resolve issues. The same issues reported by volunteers about the practicalities of having their own horse on scene still apply. Where police use mounted patrols to increase community engagement in other areas, they use trained police horses. These go through a stringent and long training process to ensure for example that they can stay on command (reference). The extent to which a non-police trained horse could do this with confidence is unclear. That is not to say that these risks have occurred, but that the potential risks are greater.

*'A Thames Valley police horse is trained to stand so if that police officer has to get off to go and deal, they don't have to find out where they're going to tie their horse up, they don't have to worry about it wandering off, they get off, they deal, they get back on the horse. Whereas you've got a privately owned horse... that's not something that's standard with most people.'*



## 5. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Whilst the Volunteers on Horseback scheme is not indispensable, the benefits and experiences that volunteers have identified and reported appear to add real value to Northamptonshire police and the communities they serve. Whilst small in scale, the influence in rural communities may arguably be significant given the isolated nature of such areas. The direct impact of the initiative in resolving issues is not fully clear, and is something which should be considered as a potential organisational image risk if concerns are not followed-up or addressed. But the visible policing presence does seem well-regarded by communities served, and interactions reported are overwhelmingly positive. The benefit of these positive community relations may further encourage local communities to report issues/concerns, providing community intelligence – the value of which can bring enhanced police knowledge and effective resource allocation (Innes and Lowe, 2012).

As per findings from the current academic literature, there is evidence to suggest that experiences of PSV volunteers here concur with the range of benefits identified. As per Giacomantonio et al.'s (2015) study, the volunteers often spoke about the advent of riding on a horse meant they were a more visible presence, with horses acting as an 'ice-breaker' encouraging community interactions; furthermore, engagements were reported to be frequent and positive. This appears to accord with findings that interactions are more positive with the presence of police.

Whilst some of the current PSV literature in the field identifies potential issues with organisational risk, it seems from the perspectives of volunteers involved that these are well managed. Given that the scheme also reconciles well with volunteers hobbies, concerns from public sector unions about volunteers plugging resource gaps are minimised, for they are providing a service in addition to that which is already provided to rural communities.

In summary, from the perspectives of those involved the benefits of the scheme outweighs the potential risks involved, provided that dynamic risk assessments continue, and the parameters of the role are clearly identified.

### Recommendations

- It is recommended that the scheme continue in its current form, for it manages to ensure that PSV support is provided to communities and Northamptonshire Police, whilst reconciling well with volunteers' hobbies and personal life.
- The volunteers identified that the uniform provided is inconsistent between summer and winter, with different crests/logos and lettering. This should be reconciled to ensure riders are a visible presence in summer when they are more likely to ride. It is also important to maximise the impact of visibility in representing the police. Reflective leg bands should be of higher quality, given the road safety risks.
- The mounted PCSO role reconciles well with the volunteers on horseback scheme, for there are a number of similarities between the two roles which provides consistency for the public in better understanding the parameters of the role. Mounted special constables however



changes the potential expectations and exposure to risks for public and staff safety, and organisational image.

- If volunteers are required to log where they plan to ride in order to ensure their safety, then the current text box on Duty Sheet is too small to provide accurate information. This should therefore be rectified.
- A small number of participants expressed a desire to be more involved in resolving local issues. The implications of this should be duly considered in relation to how this could change the scope of the role, given that other volunteers were content with the current boundaries. It seems however there is potential in encouraging a community liaison between rural communities and the police. With the upcoming establishment of the parish special constable role, both parties could form a valuable team; this is therefore worthy of potential consideration.
- Related to this, opportunities should be considered for those volunteers who wish to task at specific events. The main risk identified of this is the unpredictability of such events, and so horses will need to be trained to deal with potential eventualities pragmatically considered from risk assessments – provided that volunteers are comfortable in doing so.
- If specific issues are reported, volunteers should be updated as to the priority and progress of resolution. This will consequently ensure the public are well-informed about how concerns are being addressed, improving police-community relations. Consistent lines of communication between sector sergeants and volunteers may ensure that this occurs, given than there is currently an inconsistent picture across the county.
- For research purposes, and in order to further evidence the nature of the role, volunteers could be asked to complete diary entries over a set period of time after completing a ride. To minimise the impact of this, a sample of volunteers could be chosen.
- Public surveys could be undertaken to better evidence the extent to which the public recognise and value the scheme.
- A short period of head cams for volunteers on horseback could be undertaken to document the impact of their presence on driving behaviours. Perhaps replicated annually and in different geographies.
- Consideration of the impact of the weather on the activities of the volunteers on horseback, recognising that reduced visibility in winter months may impact on public perceptions. Increased foot patrols by parish special constables during these times may mitigate these concerns.
- The training and policy document were considered clear and understood by all volunteers. Limited risks were identified and nothing beyond the normal course of riding on the roadside and engaging with the public. The only recommendation in this respect would be to consider including training or advice in the management of difficult people or challenging situations, where some volunteers felt less confident about being confronted by upset or angry members of the public. The 'direct-line' to the local policing team provided reassurance to volunteers regarding both their safety and feeling valued.



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